

June 12, 2009.

Professor Jonathan Michie  
OUDCE Department Director  
Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square  
Oxford, OX1 2JA

Dear Dr. Michie,

On June 3<sup>rd</sup>, Dr. De Grandis suspended my access to the online Political Philosophy course for breach of netiquette and referred the case to the Department's Director of Public Programmes. One week later, Mr. Philip Healy, Director of Public Programmes for OUDCE, sent note that he concurs with the course administrator's judgement and that he had decided to make my removal from the course final.

In making his decision, Mr. Healy admitted to having looked only at the postings from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June. Since the incident in question did not happen in a vacuum and was preceded by a series of events, it is my contention that Mr. Healy's decision was based on incomplete information and that had his mandate been to look at the entire case his decision would have been different. I therefore contend that a re-evaluation is necessary if justice is to be served.

The "Complaints and Appeal Procedure" dictates that I direct my appeal to you, which is why I am about to present my case and the facts to the best of my ability and in strict adherence to the truth. It is my hope that once you are in possession of all the facts you will come to a different conclusion than Mr. Healy. I hereby outline my position for your consideration.

The alleged breach of netiquette for which I have been expelled from the course ensued on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June when Gloria Portella, a fellow student, suggested that the length of my postings prevented her from keeping up with the course work.

## APPEAL

In making my case I will attempt to demonstrate that Dr. Giovanni De Grandis' recommendation that I be removed from the course was:

1. based primarily on ulterior motives and not on the alleged breach of netiquette
2. an attempt to offload his share of responsibility derived from his own misguided decision to publicly solicit answers as to why students did not participate in the forums

3. unfair both in the severity of the punishment and in the double standards that it reveals

I will also demonstrate that:

4. the complaints directed at me by a few of my fellow students were motivated by self-serving interests.
5. the decision to apply the most severe punishment is inconsistent with the department's common application of the rules and with the university's mission, values and objectives.
6. Dr. De Grandis' decision and Mrs. Portella's actions subvert my constitutional right to free speech and my academic right to expound ideas and ideals without fear of retribution.

Last, I hold that the university needs to re-evaluate its definition of what is or is not appropriate and thus what falls within the scope of netiquette since:

7. Appropriateness is a culturally and individually relative term and an online course which draws students from across the globe needs to be tolerant of the differences they bring to the table, giving participants wider latitude to express themselves.
8. The manner in which individuals debate differs as a result of cultural values and the individual's background and life experience.

## **POINT 1**

Dr. De Grandis and I came to disagree early in the course and maintained an uneasy relationship throughout. Here are the incidents in question.

### **Example A:**

Dr. Giovanni de Grandis asked the following:

*"I think it would be interesting if those who have preferred Locke try to address the argument advanced by the admirers of Hobbes, and vice versa. This should stimulate an interesting exchange of arguments and reasons."* (Saturday, 2 May 2009, 08:48 PM)

My contribution (please see Unit 2: State of Nature forum; Locke and Hobbes discussion) to the task posted by Dr. Giovanni de Grandis elicited the following comment from him:



Re: Locke and Hobbes

by [Giovanni De Grandis](#) - Monday, 4 May 2009, 11:13 PM

Kevin I am happy to have unshackled you, but let's remember a warning from a famous song: "When the levee breaks, we'll have no place to stay" 🤪. So I would suggest that even when our thoughts are crying to break free, we keep a few basic restraints.

There are two points in your post that I did not like. First, when you write:

I cannot see how one can defend Hobbes' theory. Not only is it based on an incomplete and unnecessarily negative description of man's character, it is also perverted by ulterior motives: to get out of civil war, to please rich benefactors, and to grovel to the monarchy.

Here I have two remarks. The first is that we should cultivate our generosity of mind and always try to understand how and why decent and honest people can endorse opinions that we find repugnant. If we do not make this effort we run the risk of demonizing our opponents and of seeing them as evil, which is usually a move towards dehumanizing our adversaries. Second, I don't like the attacks *ad personam*, not even against dead philosophers. Hobbes was not trying to gain any personal advantage in stating his views. Indeed he only managed to make himself disliked by both contending sides in the civil war. He put himself in great danger and thought prudent to flee the country. Incidentally, it would be much more plausible to accuse Locke to have a personal stake in promoting his views (Locke was the protégé and the anonymous mouthpiece of Lord Shaftesbury, the architect of the so-called glorious revolution) and of not being fully open: he never admitted to be the author of the Two Treatises on Government.

The second point is your use of repetitions and capital letters in your last paragraph. This is an example of what has been called *say-it-louder* rhetoric: "If people don't like what you're saying, say it louder, then they'll like it!" (as David Frum put it). Capital letters are like shouting, and we can do without them.

Kevin, you have shown us how articulate and generous you can be, so we won't be satisfied with anything less than your best! 🤪

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Re: Locke and Hobbes

by [Kevin Galalae](#) - Tuesday, 5 May 2009, 05:34 PM

And I thought I was doing great. That goes to show you how right Locke was when he said that we should not try to be our own judges.

Before reading your email I was as excited as a little kid and full of anticipation to hear what you had to say about my elaborate posting. I thought, Giovanni will surely be impressed by the hard work I put into it and the complex and original thoughts I expressed. I was expecting things like: *"Kev, great work! What novel way of comparing the three philosophers. I have never seen it done this way. Your illustration shows some high-order thinking. Even though I don't quite agree with the narrow vision you have ascribed to Hobbes, I nevertheless appreciate the mode in which you have synthesized the information. Very comprehensive and very illuminating. It goes to show you that indeed a picture tells a thousand words. That's what I call out of the box thinking."*

As for my third argument, where I dispute Hobbes' assessment of man's nature and the dubious way in which according to him people come to have government, I was sure you would say things like: *"Wow! Your version of how authority might have arisen in the state of nature is truly convincing. While Hobbes leaves the question unanswered of how authority was born from the state of universal hostilities he believed primitive men would have found themselves in, yours elegantly shows a plausible chain of cause and effect that gradually facilitated this genesis. I found your description of how men would behave in the face of conflict far more plausible than Hobbes'. While he saw every man and woman as resorting to war to get their way or to protect themselves, which would require that everyone of his savages were equally courageous and without fear of pain or death, you have shown that the most common response would have been to run and hide since most men are by nature cowards. Eventually they would have delegated their defence to a stronger individual who would have become the main source of authority. While Hobbes' government falls from the sky fully baked and ready for consumption, yours grows out of the muck of life's chaos. Way to go, Kev. You have challenged Hobbes and won."*

But my phantasy was shattered the moment I opened your e-mail and instead of praise I found that you have piled on me without remorse. I was really flying high before, but you have chopped my wings. Gone is the excitement; gone the enthusiasm.

As a teacher (I taught for several years), I also once viewed constructive criticism as the best way to teach until one day a much better teacher than me gave me a very valuable piece of advice. He said, "Kev, you should never deliver bad news without a doze of good news". I replied by asking what to do if there are no good news and he smiled and said that I should make them up or at least magnify the least bit of positive.

I was actually so perplexed by your completely negative response that I had to go back into the forum to ascertain that none of the text I had posted has been chopped out somehow, perhaps as the result of a computer glitch. But it's all there, which means that I have to apologize for my ineptitude and for the offence I have apparently caused my fellow students to suffer, not to mention for offending Hobbes. So here I go.

Indeed there is a patronizing tone in my critique and the hint that anyone who supports Hobbes' view is irrational. For that I apologize. It is a blow below the belt.

If I have given the impression that I was attempting to demonize any of Hobbes' admirers, I am honestly sorry. It was the furthest thing from my mind. I was merely expressing my consternation at how anyone could find reason in the man's writings let alone consider his theories worthwhile. I have made great effort to read and ponder over everyone's contributions for or against Hobbes and I unfailingly read every entry as it comes in, since I have them automatically forwarded to my blackberry.

I was merely attacking his concepts not the man and most certainly not his admirers. I am an ardent supporter of not only the freedom of expression but also the freedom to entertain whatever notions one likes regardless how outlandish they may seem to me or anyone else. So, once again, my apologies to anyone who feels unduly insulted by my analysis.

To my defence, though, Giovanni, I must mention that you have solicited our responses to Hobbes' theories and our critiques of our colleagues' arguments. I did not know that your request came with the caveat of self-censorship. Since I find the man's philosophy repugnant in a visceral way, I thought it important that I relay this to my fellow students. I did so without addressing any particular student, so as not to give offense.

I cannot agree with you that Locke is more deserving of suspicion than Hobbes for having ulterior motives. Locke challenged the status quo in a way that Hobbes did not. It just happened that Hobbes published at a time when there was little tolerance from either party involved in the civil war for even the most gingerly dissenting ideas. At a time of war, the factions involved in the conflict want blind adherence to their own stand

and not subtle reasoning that suggests even a hint of disloyalty.

Locke, on the other hand, rocked the very foundation of the monarchy. He was anti-authoritarianist in a society that was quintessentially authoritarianist (and remains abysmally and hopelessly hierarchical). His association with Anthony Ashley Cooper, later the First Earl of Shaftesbury, was that of two like-minded brothers-in-arms, bent on changing the status quo. Locke urged individuals to use their reason to seek truth rather than simply adhere to the dictates of authority or to the delusions of superstition. He took far more risk than Hobbes and from within the country not from the safety of Paris. Most importantly, Locke was promoting a form of government that did not exist, democracy, and that stood in stark contrast to the political reality of the day and in clear opposition to the long-standing and mighty political force of the monarchy. Hobbes sang the glory of the monarchy and attempted to weaken the moral arguments of the opposition, which fought a losing battle.

Hobbes was at no point in danger. He left England for the safety of the continent long before the monarchy was deposed and returned in 1651 only after having been assured the protection of the revolutionary English government of Oliver Cromwell. His fleeing the country was a proactive not a reactive measure to any real or perceived threat or persecution. Given his suspicious nature and the low regard he held his fellow human beings in, it is no surprise that he should have assumed the worse and scurried away to hide abroad, where, by the way, he was accommodated in great comfort by the exiled Prince of Wales, where he served as his tutor, and who later, when the monarchy was restored and the Prince of Wales became King Charles II, wasted no time in rewarding Hobbes with a fat life-long pension.

Having opened my mind to your insistence that Hobbes deserves fair hearing from me, I read more in the hope of finding something worthwhile in his writings. I wish to point out that even before I expanded my Hobbesian horizons, I was the only one to point out that he deserves praise in one respect. I take the liberty of quoting myself:

It is in relation to the last point you make (i.e. that "*nobody can be bound by moral obligations without having freely consented to them or to the procedure to produce them*") that I see Hobbes' contribution as being valuable. He, after all, supported absolute authority only to the extent that all subscribed to it - which, in effect, means that no one is to be left out and that all profit from it - and only insofar as that authority is effective in making people respect the law, which implies that it must earn the right to govern by governing justly.

It is as much as one could expect from a man living in a monarchy and drawing his livelihood from the good graces of wealthy benefactors that allowed him a life of leisure. Seen this way, Hobbes' Leviathan represents a slight but important departure from the Divine Right of Kings (i.e. that monarchs rule with authority granted by God) and paved

the way for Locke who explicitly attacked this doctrine.

Upon searching, I found something that is even more praiseworthy in Hobbes, his ideas on toleration, atheism and heterodoxy and his questioning of religious authorities, a subject that I delight in. It turns out the good old Hobbes is a man of my liking, after all. He and I see eye-to-eye that faith is and ought to be a personal choice not an institutional prescription, that all public expression of religion is empty of spiritual significance, that temporal institutions are irrelevant to eschatology, that faith is 'internal and invisible' and that 'interior cogitations' about faith are not subject to the commands of even God. His "challenges to constituted doctrinal authority" and his "commitment to an almost Kantian understanding of the freedom of the intellect" are the true contributions Hobbes made to knowledge (at least, in my opinion) and not his political philosophy. On this subject, I recommend Justin Champion's paper to my fellow students

([http://eprints.rhul.ac.uk/147/1/Champion\\_TOLERATE.pdf](http://eprints.rhul.ac.uk/147/1/Champion_TOLERATE.pdf).)

Despite this, I remain as adamantly disgusted by his description of man and as irreverent about the worthiness of his political philosophy as I always was, but I have found it within my heart, not to mention my mind, to give Hobbes credit where credit is truly due.

As for my use of repetitions and capital letters, I can only say that you have misinterpreted them. They were not meant to denote shouts - I was unaware that it is even possible to shout in writing, the very notion seems a contradiction in terms to me - but to emphasize what I believe is a crucial point; a point I did not want my fellow students to miss. Incidentally, you couldn't have chosen a worse person to quote than David Frum since he does not feature large in my book ever since he came up with the 'axis of evil' statement ( a statement that, coming from a Jew to be thrown at Muslim countries by a born-again Christian president who believes in the apocalypse, should have been viewed with the greatest suspicion; the kind of healthy suspicion I have exercised against Hobbes but the western media failed to address because it would have offended the powers to be), not to mention that he was the mouthpiece of the worse president America has ever had.

Also, let me get this right, it is OK to use emoticons to relay one's emotional state but it is not OK to use repetitions and capital letters?

I will conclude by saying that since I am a Lockesian and believe in every individual's right to address wrongdoings (regardless of one's pecking order), I feel compelled to point out that by going out of your way to see anything positive in my posting you are committing the same offense

against me as you are accusing me of having committed against Hobbes.

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My most wholehearted apologies

by [Giovanni De Grandis](#) - Tuesday, 5 May 2009, 10:48 PM

Kevin, after reading your message, I must straightaway admit that you are absolutely right that I am guilty of the same offense that I have attributed to your treatment of Hobbes. I have also felt very stupid for having addressed you in a way that completely overlooked all the valuable things in your message and in your contributions in general. It has not only been a textbook example of very bad teaching practice, as you rightly point out, but it was also a spectacular failure to express effectively my overall response to your message(s).

I am therefore willing to present you my sincere apologies for having been so negative, for having completely failed to stress all the praiseworthy features of your message (and there are many) and for having caused you distress and disappointment.

Really, I am sincerely sorry.

The fact is that I do think that you are doing brilliantly in this course and I thoroughly appreciate both the quality and the regularity of your contributions. How come I failed to express this? I think that I did that stupid mistake of taking it for granted that you are doing very well: it is so obvious to me that I thought it must have been obvious and apparent to anyone. I am not offering this as an excuse, but as an explanation. I should have said it much more explicitly, instead of thinking that the tongue-in-cheek opening and the final sentence were enough to make it clear.

You are doing extremely well, you are offering an invaluable contribution to the forums and I most wholeheartedly welcome your taking issue with the philosophers we are studying. You are doing exactly what we hope our students would do, and you are doing it remarkably well.

I have been a very incompetent communicator in allowing two minor formal criticism to obscure all the positive things you are achieving.

I am sure that you did not mean to be aggressive in using the capital letters and unfortunately the so-called netiquette is just a convention and I did not made those conventions (and I do not even know them in details): I have been told not to use capital letters because they are interpreted as shouting.



Please accept my apologies because they are sincere. It would be too bad if I have put you off.

This episode, needless to say, would not have endeared me to Dr. De Grandis.

### Example B:

Re: Locke and  
Hobbes

by Giovanni De  
Grandis -  
Monday, 4 May  
2009, 11:56 PM

Kevin, there are some arguments in your reasoning that I do not find persuasive. Some have already been challenged by others, so I will not comment on them. I find some of your interpretations of historical development rather perplexing. The first is your abhorrence for absolutism. I think that this reaction comes from projecting on absolutist monarchies our horror for 20th century totalitarianism. Absolute monarchies were very different. In their times the great political problem was the excessive dispersion of power: absolutism was effective in bringing about effective centralised power, which was a precondition for the birth of modern states and even for modern representative democracies. Before the establishment of the centralized power of absolute monarchs European states were plagued by continual rivalries, struggles and wars between local feudal lords or princes or dukes etc.

Your reading of the French revolution is very optimistic, but we should not forget that it did not bring about freedom and democracy, but first the terror (and a healthy reminder of what moralism in politics can produce!) and then Bonaparte's despotism.

Finally, I do not share your confident view about progress -a topic for which I have a profound interest. In short, my view is that progress is a very ambiguous concept. We can all safely agree that there has been progress in knowledge, in technology and in human productive abilities. So I believe that *some kind* of progress has taken place. But this kind of progress does not imply *moral* progress. I don't think that there is any overwhelming evidence that human beings have become more civilized, considerate, altruist or respectful throughout history. It is trite, yet true, to remind that the 20th century has offered a sample book of atrocities which defies any view of moral progress. But take

also a simpler example like the Internet. It is a wonderful tool that enables people to do many commendable things and yet the biggest business on the Internet is the porn industry. Even worse on the internet you can find pedophiles, organ trafficker, drug dealers, instructions to make bombs or hijack an airplane, nazi and racist propaganda and we could go on...

I strongly recommend you an old, little and most civilized book: *The Whig Interpretation of History* by Herbert Butterfield. From which the following quite comes:

Instead of seeing the modern world emerge as the victory of the children of light over the children of darkness in any generation, it is at least better to see it emerge as the result of a clash of wills , a result which often neither party wanted or even dreamed of, a result which indeed in some cases both parties would equally have hated, but a result for the achievement of which the existence of both and the clash of both were necessary.

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Re: Locke and  
Hobbes

by [Kevin  
Galalae](#) -  
Thursday, 7  
May 2009,  
01:24 PM

Hi Giovanni,

I must admit that I have never looked at absolutism from the historical perspective you have just outlined. As an ardent supporter of global governance, I should have. After all, it represents an important phase in the geographic enlargement of political authority and a precursor to the global governance that is yet to come. It was inevitable that it came to be, and, for better or worse, it achieved greater European integration and thus represents progress.

The French Revolution did precipitate a series of unsavoury events, that I admit, but it was a political experiment without precedent. Those who initiated it walked into the darkness of the unknown, and some never made it out, but France eventually came out into the light. Moreover, fundamental political change has throughout history come accompanied by its two handmaidens: violence and failure. Fact remains, without the French Revolution we would not have democracy, or, at least, it would

have taken a lot longer to get to democracy.

I lament the imperceptibly slow advance of moral progress as much as you do. Those who know me have grown tired of hearing me complain about it. Nevertheless, in addition to Gloria's valid observations, I want to add the concept of tolerance as a sign of hope. You have discussed it tangentially in your online article "A case for Relativism" that you have posted on HASSNERS (<http://hassers.blogspot.com/2008/03/case-for-relativism-by-giovanni-de.html>). Even in my darkest days, I cannot but admit that human beings today are more tolerant than they have ever been in the past and that, as a transcultural principle, tolerance is on the ascent almost everywhere on Earth.

Also, although modern man may not be more compassionate than in the past, he is at least less cruel and that too is moral progress. As I thought about it more, and in light of your article on relativism, it dawned on me that human beings can only be better to the extent that the society they live in allows them to be better. Considering how much better our material needs are met now than in the past, and how much better we are protected under the law, and how much easier our lives are, it is really puzzling why human beings are not substantially more ethical or more moral than they used to be. The answer lies perhaps in the struggle between our individual needs and our collective responsibilities that we are all engaged in. Both our individual needs and our collective responsibilities are greater now than they have ever been, and, since they are at odds, the internal struggle we face between what we want for ourselves and what we must give to society is mightier than ever before in man's history. That means that the ground we have gained through technological and scientific progress is being eroded by the ground we are losing by the greater internal struggles we must face.

With your last point, Herbert Butterfield's quote, you have given me ammunition to turn it against you. I know you meant it as an explanation that the good in us or the good among us has/have not won over the bad in us or over the bad among us, but have rather worn each other down to a compromise and that, as a result, the world we live in is neither white nor black. You meant to rightfully tell me that there is no absolute right or wrong and I should therefore get down from my high moral horse. Ultimately you also probably meant to tell me that I should not "warp the past to see it in terms of the issues of the present", which is what Butterfield's book, according to Wikipedia, was trying to tell.

I just want to point out that within this paragraph Butterfield uses the verb "clash" twice. The modern world, he says, is the result of a "clash of wills" and then concludes by saying that the end result would not have come to be were it not "for the existence of both and the clash of

both"('both' meaning the children of darkness and the children of light). My point is that whatever came to be was the result of a **clash**. And the word suggests something far more forceful than academic retorts devoid of passion and diluted by niceties.

I guess I did get my wings back. I hope you are not finding this insolent, but interesting.

Oh, another thing, in 1683 Oxford burned all of Hobbes' books because the professors of the day did not like his thoughts. By comparison, my criticism, however strong, is just a pinprick.

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In a personal email Dr. De Grandis intimated that my mention of his article in HASSNERS was not the compliment that I intended it to be.

**tutor.politicalphilo** (tutor.politicalphilo@conted.ox.ac.uk)

9. Mai 2009 16:50:39

Hello Kevin,

it is curious because I did not know that they had put online that little piece on relativism. A student asked me if he could quote me in his blog and I told him to feel free to do so. I did not imagine he would have put that whole piece. I don't mind, but, although in the end I am probably an atheist I don't share the militant attitude and the anti-religious feelings of ASSERS.

Have a good weekend

Giovanni

Once again, by chance rather than intent, I gave Dr. De Grandis reason to dislike me. For the next four units, Dr. De Grandis, to his credit, maintained a very pleasant tone and my contributions generated many positive comments from him. For my part, I tempered my language so as not to give offence.

### Example C

In Unit 5, Plato against Democracy, Dr. De Grandis appears to have assumed the identity of Max Tant or used him as a proxy to engage in a lengthy debate with me on the merit of direct democracy. We both dug in our heels - I in defence of direct democracy and he in favour of

representative democracy - and the debate became somewhat heated. See our exchange in the discussion on “Plato’s Argument”.

It is after this debate that Dr. De Grandi’s attitude towards me changed dramatically. He refused to answer a question I posed at the end of my contribution to the Direct Democracy forum (see Unit 6: Defending Democracy, Rousseau and Democracy Forum, Direct Democracy discussion) without giving any indication either publicly or privately. Even though I reiterated my question in a private email, Dr. De Grandis chose not to even acknowledge my email let alone answer my question. To this day, my question in regards to the originality of the Universal Stabilizer Principle I have formulated remains unanswered. Since it is a perfectly legitimate question and it predates the alleged breach of netiquette incident, Dr. De Grandis’ silence can only be explained by his disapproval of the socio-political ideals I have expounded in my debate with his probable alias, Max Tant.

The only logical explanation to this change in attitude is that Dr. De Grandis and no doubt many of my fellow students found my ideas on the division of labour and income distribution controversial; and being unable to refute them in the debate made them particularly ill-disposed towards me. To give you an idea of what I am referring to, I have attached one of several expositions I have posted on this subject.

Re: Direct  
democracy

by Kevin Galalae -  
Thursday, 28 May  
2009, 03:50 AM

Direct or participatory democracy is highly attractive because it alone fits the definition of democracy (“rule of the people, by the people, and for the people”) and can fulfill democracy’s fundamental principles: (1) that all members of society have equal access to power, and (2) that all enjoy universally recognized freedoms and liberties. To make it work, however, we would have to redesign society from the ground up if we are to overcome the procedural and organizational problems the application of direct democracy poses.

The difficulties foreseen by a system of direct democracy are encapsulated by the following questions:

1. Are all people able to rise to the intellectual level required of legislators?

The objection implied by this question is that only well-informed and well-educated people are fit to pass laws that affect all of us. But as I have

previously argued the intelligence and education needed to understand all issues that legislators encounter cannot be obtained by any person within a lifetime, therefore we are deluding ourselves by believing that our elected representatives, regardless how intelligent they may be, can rise to the task. The deepest pool of intelligence, skills and knowledge is to be found in the general population and, consequently, the more people one includes in the count the greater the combined volume of knowledge, skills, and intelligence. Sceptics have argued that although the people as a whole possess the greatest combined knowledge, it does not mean that every individual voter will reflect this superlative judgement in their vote. The Universal Stabilizer Principle that I have formulated above addresses this concern by positing that individuals do not need to make the right decision for society at large, they only need to make the right decision as far as they are concerned, because as long as everyone in society, without exception, is allowed to vote, those with the greatest motivation will come to the fore and the ensuing law will be right because it will reflect the most ardent needs of the most highly motivated block of people. It will therefore be the majority's will. But since different people will vote on different issues and not all people will vote on every issue, and since only those people who are motivated by the object of the law proposed will likely cast a vote, the Universal Stabilizer Principle will act as an equilibrating force between minority and majority rights.

2. How can we all find the time needed to make informed decisions when this task requires a great deal of time and effort?

The only way to allow everyone the luxury of time that political participation would require is by a radically different division of labour. As I have previously argued, the current division of labour is absurdly inefficient since it operates according to the principle of exclusion not inclusion. This is the result of class struggle over the economic benefits of an increasingly automated economy that requires ever fewer people in the production process. As a result, the struggle for jobs has become the epic struggle of our times and it consumes all of us as the competition for jobs becomes fiercer, especially since capital has been divorced from Western labour and manufacturing is moving where labour costs are cheapest. The only way to rectify the ensuing income inequalities between professionals and labourers and the accumulated wealth inequalities between social classes, is by tying the income of the highest earner to that of the lowest according to a preset formula, and by allowing every individual to divide his/her work equally between intellectual and manual work so that professions with high earning power cannot be monopolized by a few to the exclusion of the rest, and so that the better educated cannot manipulate the system to their benefit. How the first measure ought to work, I have already discussed in my tangle with Max. As for the second, it means that every doctor must also be a carpenter, every lawyer also a garbage man, every teacher also a chamber maid, every professor also a labourer, every

architect also a factory floor worker, and so on, and that each will work manually 50% of the time and intellectually the remaining 50%. This will allow a more equitable division of labour while also ensuring a more equitable division of wealth, since professional arrogance will no longer work as a motivation to tilt the system in one's favour. It will also ensure that invidious distinctions are minimized so that class coalescence cannot form, which is why ultimately wealth and power inequalities take root. I am sure that by now every lawyer in our class is already considering me an enemy of the well-heeled, but that is not the case. I merely see no other way to the dilemma we are in. The first objection that will have arisen by now is how in the world do I intent to get a simple worker to perform intellectual tasks. The answer to this is opening up the education system and increasing its capacity many times over. Education, therefore, will have a far greater role than ever before, so much so that everyone will have to teach at one point or another in their lives. Education must be freed from the stranglehold of universities and colleges and made the domain of every factory and every lab, of every hospital and every business. Education must be returned, at least partially, to the master-apprentice system that served Europe so well for so long. Even so, you will argue, many will not possess the intelligence or the motivation to acquire the qualifications needed for professional expertise. I agree that this will be the case, but I point out that not all of us need to be doctors and lawyer, architects and college professors, and that intellectual contributions can be made at lower levels of the economy. There is no reason why a labourer cannot also be a medical assistant, or why a garbage man cannot learn how to manage a business, or why a chamber maid cannot work as a lab technician.

3. How can we pass laws that require everyone's participation when it would be impossible to assemble the entire population?

Given the technological progress we have made in the areas of mass communication this is perhaps the easiest hurdle to overcome that still stands in the way of direct democracy. Computer technology and the electronic transfer of data means that crucial information can be instantly disseminated to a mass audience, thus making the physical assembly of people unnecessary. Data encryption allows the protection of data electronically transmitted, thus enabling the protection of such data, making electronic voting from a personal computer possible.

While direct democracy was impossible to achieve in the past due to technical and physical limitations, this is no longer the case.

A similar view I posted earlier prompted Dr. De Grandis' probable alias, Max Tant, to accuse me of holding anarchist and communist views; an accusation that I responded to forcefully, being a political refugee from the former East Bloc countries and having suffered years of persecution at the hands of communists, nearly a decade of family separation, and my father's six-year imprisonment and torture as a convicted dissident.

I therefore allege that Dr. De Grandis' primary motivation in his decision to throw me out of the course was not based on the exchange between my fellow student, Mrs. Gloria Portella, and I, but because he, along with many of my students, came to dislike the socio-political ideas and ideals my postings express and the conviction with which I expressed them.

Were this not the case, Dr. De Grandis would have been satisfied with a one-week suspension of my access to the forums. Instead, he chose to proceed to the maximum sentence, thus invalidating my work over a period of six weeks (60% of the course) and denying me the right to freely express my views. In giving his own prejudices precedence over my right to finish the course he has revealed not only his true colors but also great disdain for my academic efforts and for my constitutional right to engage in political discourse.

Dr. De Grandis revealed his dislike of my ideals rather clearly and forcefully in a private email where he went as far as accusing me of being no better than "religious fanatics and political repressive regimes", a comparison that I took issue with and that I found to be utterly inappropriate. Here is the email in question:

**tutor.politicalphilo** ([tutor.politicalphilo@conted.ox.ac.uk](mailto:tutor.politicalphilo@conted.ox.ac.uk))

June 3, 2009 14:58:44

Kevin,

I will ignore what is in the P.S. and simply point out one thing to you. This whole issue is unpleasant enough for everybody. I am trying to learn a lesson from the mistakes that I have made. I think you should better drop the explanation that you have spoken some inconvenient truth, exposed people's hidden motives and demonstrated your intellectual superiority and that has generated mean feelings against you. I don't think this was the case. Two things have not been accepted. One is your habit of attacking some of the ideas that you oppose not on their own merit, but by suggesting that they spring from ignoble motives. (The implication of this attitude is that who disagrees is not simply wrong, but evil. I hope you see this is the attitude of all religious fanatics and political repressive regimes). When you do that to dead philosophers it is a lack of charity, but when you do that with your fellow students this becomes a personal attack from a stranger and how can you fail to see that nobody accepts to have one's own integrity questioned by a stranger? The second is that you have subtly tried to force other students to discuss and consider your ideas. I have been stupid in not realizing it earlier, but it became apparent in the direct democracy forum. You have tried to turn the course into a tribune to express your ideas.



These problems could have been discussed and solved in the common room discussion, but things took another turn that made it impossible to fix the problems.

And this is my last comment on the whole issue.

Regards

Giovanni

**kevin galalae** ([kgalalae@hotmail.com](mailto:kgalalae@hotmail.com))

Mittwoch, 3. Juni 2009 15:48:13

Giovanni,

You have misrepresented the intentions and content of my postings. I have never suggested that ideas spring from ignoble motives without proving it. Furthermore, what I have always tried (and obviously succeeded too well) is to show how holding certain ideas leads to immoral acts or is used to justify injustice and inequality. If you go back to my posts and read them without being blinded by anger, the evidence will speak for itself. Your accusation that I attack dead philosophers and living people is absurd. What I have attacked is the flaws in their theories, which is what political philosophy is supposed to do, were it not for the deep-rooted hypocrisy that permeates every aspect of capitalist societies and of the "education" system in capitalist societies. And that is exactly what you and some of the students could not take. In eliciting the kind of anger that I did, I have brought to the surface deep-seated prejudices and in being kicked off the course I have demonstrated that although the West and by extension Oxford boast to encourage free debate and free speech, it only does so as long as one does not rock the foundation of the power structure and the cosy arrangements between the established elements of society.

Your accusation that I tried to turn the course into a tribune of my ideas and that I have forced others to discuss my ideas is once again laden with blinding hatred and a total lack of honesty. How can I possibly force anyone to do such thing when this is a virtual course? It is the force of my ideas that people have found irresistible to engage, like it or not. And if we cannot discuss our political ideas in a political philosophy course then what good is such a course for? A cash cow for the university? A sham attempt to show the world that Oxford is in step with the times? Are you suggesting that in such a course one ought to dilute one's ideas so as to blend in and stroke the sensibilities of the many? How poorly this reflects on the university and on you!

I take your reluctance to answer my questions as a no. I point out that I am entitled to know how such a process will unfold. I also point out that in withholding our correspondence from the decision makers you will have aided and abated in the miscarriage of justice. And I promise you that this will come back to haunt you.

Sincerely,

Kevin Galalae

Giovanni,

Your implication that I am like all religious fanatics and politically oppressive regimes is completely out of line and out of touch with reality. I have fought political oppression all my life and I have scars to show for it. I do work for UNICEF and OMEP. My entire career and life revolve around doing the right thing and not just pretending to do the right thing. I have supported children and orphanages in India and I always go out of my way to help friends and strangers alike. I am the most peaceful and altruistic person you will probably ever meet.

The reason the West has extremists on its back is because of our refusal to admit the hypocrisy the West represents and the damage it does to the world. If you and the rest of your compatriots listened to people like me, the world would be a better place. Forget not that it is people like me who change the world and people like you who study our thoughts and actions in retrospect with slavish respect.

Sincerely,

Kevin Galalae

Unsuspectingly, in his email Dr. De Grandis reveals in the heat of his anger that it is my postings in the direct democracy forum that offended him most, which supports my contention that it is the substance and not the form of my postings that he resents and that it is at this point in the course that he decided to cut me off. Somewhat absurdly, he also accuses me of trying to “turn the course into a tribune to express [my] ideas”. In his anger he seems to forget that the point of the forums is to get students to express their ideas, which again and again he encouraged us to do. The accusation that I “have subtly tried to force other students to discuss and consider [my] ideas” is equally preposterous, for even if that had been my intention, it would be impossible to do so in a virtual environment where all students have equal access and are under no obligation to address anyone’s comments. More than that, the evidence clearly shows that all heated discussions were the result of challenges to my postings, which necessitated that I take a defensive position and were never the result of my attacks on others’ original postings. Being always on the defensive contradicts Dr. De Grandis’ allegation that I “have subtly tried to force other students to discuss and consider [my] ideas”. If anything, others’ prejudices and their attacks on me forced me to defend myself and my ideals.

The personal mistakes Dr. De Grandis is referring to reveal his culpability in the conflict that ensued when I addressed Gloria Portella’s attempt to blame the “length” of my postings for her absence from the forums (to which I will return later).

And so we are entering the second point I want to make, namely that the breach of netiquette was precipitated by Dr. De Grandis’ own misguided decision to publicly solicit answers as to why students did not participate in the forums.

## POINT 2

Why Dr. De Grandis decided to ask on the common forum “Students where are you?” is beyond me. Given the private nature of this subject, it would have been more appropriate to pose the question of participation privately not publicly. Since there is nothing to be gained by making this a public topic, Dr. De Grandis should have been discreet and sent a private email to each and every absent student so as to protect the students from embarrassing public admissions. In asking for public responses to a personal and uncomfortable matter he invited equivocation and misrepresentation.

In her attempt to eschew responsibility, Mrs. Portella’s equivocation prompted her to scapegoat the “length” of my postings from her inability to keep up with the course work. Others jumped on the bandwagon as soon as Mrs. Portella made this suggestion. In all fairness, Mrs. Portella could have been inspired by a previous posting by Ivor Middleton, in which the length of the postings was mentioned as one of several plausible causes for some students’ reluctance to participate in the forum discussions.

Initially, I gave Dr. De Grandis the benefit of the doubt and ascribed his decision to lack of experience or oversight. In light of the blood Dr. De Grandis sought from me, I now have to ask myself if it was not a deliberate action, an attempt on his part to channel some students’ frustrations and thus to accomplish what he himself desired, a pretext to throw me out of the course. Should this case ever come under the scrutiny of an outside authority, it would be interesting to see what Dr. De Grandis’ email correspondence reveals in this respect.

For the time being, what is clear is that the way in which Dr. De Grandis asked the students why they do not post is leading them on and incites them to openly criticize others.



Students where are you?

by [Giovanni De Grandis](#) - Monday, 1 June 2009, 03:55 PM

I have noticed that apart from a small group of students who contribute regularly to the forums, the majority is not participating or not doing so regularly. I would like to understand the reasons of this limited participation, but I need your help to do so. I would greatly appreciate any clue or explanation of the reasons that are holding back the students who are not regularly present on the forums. In particular, I would like to know whether there is any feature of the discussions that is disturbing you, or intimidating you or that is putting you off.

If you would like the forums to be somehow different, this is the place to express your wishes, worries and complaints.

Thank you in advance for your help 😊

If inciting the students to point fingers is not bad enough, Dr. De Grandis actions become doubly questionable when one considers that he was privy to information nobody else was. And this is what he refers to as a mistake in his email below.

Here is the mistake Dr. De Grandis is referring to. Noticing that I along with another student had become too prevalent in the forums, I asked Dr. De Grandis if I should step back. I did this on May 18, two weeks before Dr. De Grandis bothered to ask why students did not contribute to the forum discussions. Here is the private communication we had:

-----Messaggio originale-----

Da: kevin galalae [<mailto:kgalalae@hotmail.com>]

Inviato: lun 18/05/2009 19.06

A: tutor.politicalphilo

Oggetto:

Hi Giovanni,

I could not help but notice that Ivor and I have become too dominant in the fora discussions. Would you like me to step back to make room for the others? I don't want to be overbearing. On the other hand, I don't want to withhold valuable contributions. Please let me know how to proceed.

Kevin

Hi Kevin,

first of all I am sorry that I had not yet answer to your email from Friday. I have had some troubles with my connection over the weekend and it slept out of my mind. I am very glad that you are enjoying the course so much. I am not teaching online again until next year, but I hope you are still coming to Oxford in August and that we will be able to have a little philosophical chat.

As for your present question, I don't want you to step back or to reduce your contributions. My only suggestions would be two very minor tips. The first is to try not to write messages too long. Let me be clear, most of your message are not too long. A few are a little long and that might discourage those who don't have a lot of time. I also realize that sometimes it is very difficult to develop one's argument in a short space. When you have a long reasoning, my advice is to write the complete argument in an attachment and to give a summary in your post. Those interested will certainly open the attachment and read the whole argument, those with less time or less philosophically minded will read at least the summary and get the essential. (By the way writing a short summary is always a difficult and extremely

useful exercise). The other advice is that if you disagree with someone else, unless s/he is someone who is confident and keen on debate (like Ivor, Bruce, Gloria) do not shot all your arrows at them at once: that can be intimidating. Make one objection, trying to single out the one which is more likely to trigger some rethinking and to bring about the most serious difficulty in the position criticized.

Keep enjoying and contributing generously!

Best

Giovanni

Given this correspondence and his advice, it is not surprising that when allegations surfaced that the “length” of my postings was the reason why Gloria Portella fell back on the course work Dr. De Grandis felt he was partly responsible. Nevertheless, he chose to withhold this from the students when I came under attack and I had to compel him to release the information. Here is our correspondence in this respect:

-----Messaggio originale-----

Da: kevin galalae [<mailto:kgalalae@hotmail.com>]

Inviato: mer 03/06/2009 2.18

A: tutor.politicalphilo

Oggetto: RE: Common room

Giovanni,

In all fairness, I think that before you and your advisors cut me off from the course you should mention to the class that I have approached you for advice on whether I should step back from the forums or not and you have explicitly advised that I should not. I saw this coming and tried to prevent it. I attach our correspondence below.

Subject: R: Common room

Date: Wed, 3 Jun 2009 09:10:23 +0100

From: tutor.politicalphilo@conted.ox.ac.uk

To: kgalalae@hotmail.com

Kevin,

if you are cut off from the course it will not be because you have posted many contributions to the forums or because some were rather long: it will be because of what you wrote in the common room. You are an intelligent person and you can certainly see that.

Regards

Giovanni

-----Messaggio originale-----

Da: kevin galalae [<mailto:kgalalae@hotmail.com>]

Inviato: mer 03/06/2009 11.30

A: tutor.politicalphilo

Oggetto: RE: R: Common room

Giovanni,

What I wrote in the common room was in response to allegations that the "length" of my postings was the cause of some students' decision to stop posting in the forums. What Gloria said in no uncertain terms was that it is my fault she and others had stopped contributing. Since I cannot possibly force people to read or engage my postings, it could obviously not have been the "length" of my postings that bothered them. It was, as I have intimated in my email to you, the inhibiting effect my postings had on others; effect that can only be attributed to the fact that my postings inhibited others for one or all of the reasons I outlined in my email to Gloria (i.e. they are too intellectual to engage, too hard to discount, and reveal truths that are hard to face). To Gloria I framed it in an obnoxious way because her attempt to scapegoat me for her shortcomings deserved a forceful response. I should have been more diplomatic, but hypocrisy riles me up. Now if I had stepped back from the forums as I have suggested in my personal correspondence to you, the sensitive students who stopped posting because of me (for whatever reasons, be it the length, forcefulness, or content of my postings) would have felt encouraged to contribute once again. And if that had been the case, then you would not have had to ask on the common room where everybody was and why people were not posting. So this entire incident would not have occurred. Surely you must see how and why this chain of events has unfolded as it has? And that we could have prevented it from happening if I had stepped back from the forums. Therefore, the fact that I have asked you whether I should step back from the forums is highly relevant to every student who feels that I have stifled the debate. I believe the right thing to do before you conveniently cut me off from the course is to post our correspondence on the common room for all to see. I was not afraid to spell out the truth, regardless of the consequences, and nor should you. For only the truth can set us free. And isn't that what philosophy is about, spelling out the truth regardless what?

Sincerely,

Kevin Galalae

Von: **tutor.politicalphilo** (tutor.politicalphilo@conted.ox.ac.uk)

Mittwoch, 3. Juni 2009 12:56:55

An: kevin galalae (kgalalae@hotmail.com)

Kevin,

I don't agree with with your interpretation of how the events have unfolded, though I should have probably pushed more forcefully the advice to be shorter and gentler (and notice that I had asked you earlier not to be too aggressive, see for instance my posting in the 'Political experiences' discussion, on April 22). I have my share of responsibility in not having done so, and it is not my habit to hide.

Since I am not afraid of the truth I will post our correspondence in the Common Room, as you ask me. But I think that you should consider that if you had followed the advice I had offered you in our private correspondence, things would have not degenerated.

Regards

Giovanni

Von: **kevin galalae** (kgalalae@hotmail.com)

Gesendet: Mittwoch, 3. Juni 2009 13:50:45

An: Giovanni de Grandis (tutor.politicalphilo@conted.ox.ac.uk)

Giovanni,

I appreciate and I am not surprised by your integrity. You are right, I should have followed your advice to a tee. This is what I have to say in my defense. I did follow your advice as pertains to placing my long postings in attachments throughout lesson five when I was engaged by Max. However, that did not work too well since the debate became separated from the forum and what is the point of having a forum, which is a tool of interaction, when there are parallel discussions hidden in attachments. It defeats the whole purpose. That is why I returned to the forum.

Given the content of my postings, I believe I kept my contributions as short as possible. It is extremely difficult to compress complex reasoning and examples in support of such reasoning without taking some space. I did the best I could. While the length of my postings may have bothered some, we all know that the reason for this meanspirited backlash is a response to the content of my postings. So let us not mix words.

It is important to post our correspondence because it shows that I am not insensitive to other students and that I have acted in good faith and to the best of my abilities. It is also important because it shows that you must bear some of the burden of responsibility.

Sincerely,

Kevin Galalae

P.S. I have just noticed that I can no longer access the course website. If I have already been cut off, should I not have been notified of it first? And how am I supposed to know what occurs on the forum if I cannot at least read the content? Before such drastic measure is taken, I should be given the right to defend myself to each and all. I guess I have just joined the illustrious company of Hobbes and the like, whose ideas offended those of Oxford to such an extent that they forgot all about truth and integrity and resorted to barbaric actions. I consider this action equally barbaric. Last but not least, if I cannot access the course I cannot confirm that you are living up to your promise. If you are the one who has cut me off, then this action is self-serving and ignoble.

After Dr. De Grandis made our correspondence public, the next three postings were all addressed to me as unmistakeable gestures of sympathy from three of my fellow students. It is particularly telling that one of these students was Simona Vecerskyte, who only the day before was my most adamant critic and who declared that she had chosen to ignore my postings. Obviously, the students realized that I am not the only one to blame for the breach of netiquette and that their indignation at my remarks to Gloria Portella was one-sided and at least partially ill-directed.

### **POINT 3**

(Decision is unfair both in the severity of its punishment and in the double standards that it reveals.)

Given that no one's motives were pure, the unilateral punishment I have been subjected to is inappropriate and unfair. For not only am I being punished under false pretences and singled out to pay for other people's failures, I am also charged as the originator of the conflict which is blatantly false, as I will show further down.

The decision is exposed as particularly unfair when one considers that Mrs. Gloria Portella, who started the conflict and whose language was even more aggressive than mine, was allowed to stay in the course while I was not. This double standard can only be explained by the events I have described above and the biases they would have fuelled.

Above, I have presented evidence that throws under question Dr. De Grandis' impartiality. Below, I will present evidence that shows why several students chose to add their voices to that of Mrs. Portella and to demand my exclusion from the course.



## POINT 4



(The complaints directed at me by a few of my fellow students were motivated by self-serving interests.)

My exchange with Gloria brought forth four other students voicing their dissatisfaction with me. But the indignation they expressed is more likely rooted in their frustration with the debates rather than any sense of justice.

Here are a few examples of what might have fuelled their indignation.

### Example A

(pertains to Gloria Portella)

 <p>Re: Political experiences by <a href="#">Gloria Portella</a> - Tuesday, 21 April 2009, 12:41 AM</p>
<p>In Brazil those who are more than 18 years old are obliged to vote. I remember a situation in where I had to go to the electoral section to vote and I hated that. My girl was 7 months old, and she was sick. The candidates were terrible and feeling forced to go to the electoral section made me think that I had no freedom. I think it is important to participate at political movements and the vote is the most important element of the democratic process. However, how can we talk about democracy in a country in where the vote is an obligation determined by law, not by consciousness? Being more especific: The experience I had has a political nature since it led me to think about the power of the state over the citizens. That still reflects on my understanding of politics in Brazil, since we are still obliged to vote, though overall the society's participation in politics is almost zero. Also there is a moral context involving that issue: where is the legitimacy of such an obligation?</p> <p><a href="#">Show parent</a>   <a href="#">Reply</a></p>
 <p>Re: Political experiences by <a href="#">Kevin Galalae</a> - Tuesday, 21 April 2009, 09:42 PM</p> <p>I believe your frustration is ill-placed and would elicit consternation from those hapless many who can only dream of voting, and from those who are being shot at or beaten while trying to exercise their democratic right. The majority, I would think, envy your plight. You should ask yourself what Brazil would be like without the government's insistence that its citizens make their way to the voting polls and that universal suffrage</p>

is actually universal. This law jolts the masses from complacency and apathy and ensures that a hard-fought right does not wither away. It also ensures that the privileged do not erode this right underhandedly, say, for instance, by refusing to allow employees time off on election day. Furthermore, given the general character of human beings, I venture to say that it is a clever way to combat the indolent streak that runs through the populace.

Without this law, it seems obvious to me, Brazil would not have elected Lula da Silva, and without Lula, Brazil would not be the envy of the world for its success in addressing the growth in inequality. Witness the "Zero Hunger" programme which, in your President's own words, puts "poverty-eradication and the alleviation of inequality at the forefront of economic action" and deals squarely with "two evils...centuries of economic backwardness and political unrest" (see The Economist, The World in 2009, p. 52). Do you honestly think that would have happened without enforcing universal suffrage? And if that is such a hard pill to swallow just think of the previous state of affairs (in place from 1891 to 1932, according to Wikipedia), when Brazil's system of "male suffrage...excluded homeless, women, priests, the military and illiterates" (see Wikipedia article on 'universal suffrage').

The many Brazilian social initiatives introduced by Lula da Silva that are being replicated in Latin America and Africa and are a model for other nations interested in attaining the Millennium Development Goals, to say nothing about respecting the dignity of their citizens, are a direct result of compulsory voting.

Standing in line for hours to cast a vote - even in the searing heat of the Brazilian sun - is a small price to pay for untold dividends. That being said, as a father, I sympathise with your situation on that day. When it comes to my son, the entire world can wait.

For pro and con arguments on compulsory voting please see the Electoral Reform Society's website: <http://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/article.php?id=46>.

[Show parent](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Political experiences

by [Gloria Portella](#) - Tuesday, 21 April 2009, 10:59 PM

Kevin, one thing is the discourse, another one is the reality. "Hunger zero" is a good program for those who are starving, but it creates a dependency as it doesn't offer poor people the knowledge they need to change their lives. It'd be an excellent program if it was connected to an educational one, for instance. Lula is a very charismatic governor. However his approval has more to do with a good economic sustainability, achieved a decade ago, and with assistencialism, than with his competence in leading the country or in minimizing the economical differences existent between Brazilian people. Actually, poor Brazilians still don't have access to health or good education. Security in many cities is practically inexistent, and the federal government seems to be more interested in approving the creation/increase of more taxes than anything else. Needless to say, the Brazilians who elected Lula da Silva would vote on him even if they're not obliged to vote, as the power of money speaks louder than any other, especially when this money comes from the state, in a country where buying votes is a common behaviour despite the efforts of the electoral justice to change that... When the subject is politics, it's easy

to analyse what is written, or a few numbers, but when we analyse what we have and what we could have if corruption was not there, well... everything gain a different meaning!

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Re: Political experiences

by [Kevin Galalae](#) - Wednesday, 22 April 2009, 01:03 PM

I should think that preventing people from starving should come before educating them to become self-sufficient. After all, a dead person is the most obtuse of all students. As far as I know, Brazil has a free public education system. So if you want to educate someone you must first ensure that he or she lives.

Poor Brazilians will never have access to good education and health services unless and until a person like Lula makes it possible. To discount Lula for not doing it all at once seems unfair. It makes far more sense to recognise that Brazil has such a large number of poor because of the divisive and greedy policies of previous administrations.

I don't know to what extent Lula has neglected the education and health systems, but I do know that a man with his past would have every interest in improving both. Read the following excerpt from Wikipedia:

*Lula had little formal education. He did not learn to read until he was ten years old, and quit school after the fourth grade in order to work to help his family. His working life began at age 12 as a shoeshiner and street vendor. By age 14 he got his first formal job in a copper processing factory as a lathe operator. At age 19, he lost the little finger on his left hand in an accident while working as a press operator in an automobile parts factory. After losing his finger he had to run to several hospitals to receive attention. This experience increased his interest in participating within Workers' Union. Around that time, he became involved in union ctivities and held several important union posts. Brazil's dictatorship strongly curbed trade union's activities, and as a reaction Lula's views moved further to the political left. In 1969 he married Maria de Lourdes, who died of hepatitis later that year.*

If I were Brazilian, I would more readily trust someone with Lula's past over a son of privilege to do something about education and health for the poor.

Your argument that Lula's success and popularity depends on economic foundations built by his predecessors, I find unconvincing. Look at what happened to America's "economic sustainability" achieved during Clinton's era. If Lula were to have been as abysmal a president as George W. Bush, then Brazil would be in the same sinking boat as the United States and the people would curse his name. All things being equal, one must attribute Lula's high popularity after two terms in office to wise governance. Lula's approval rating, I must point out, is the highest in Latin America at over 70% (see the following link: <http://en.mercopress.com/2009/04/16/lula-da-silva-has-the-highest-approval-rating-cristina-k-the-lowest>).

You cannot possibly suggest that he bought nearly three-quarters of the population!

## Example B

(pertains to Nicola Conway)

Re: ...and more...

by Simona  
Vecerskyte -  
Thursday, 14 May  
2009, 04:52 AM

I agree with Emily and Ivor on the Wolff's example. It is an excellent one, it demonstrates that collective utility can be understood very differently by different individuals, and that consequences of such understanding, if implemented, can be everything but happiness (if happiness is something akin to the absence of pain etc).

I am confused by this theory for the reasons that Emily indicated - thinking directly vs indirectly; also the ideas of individual vs collective happiness etc. But the most confusing idea to me seems to be this "indirect utilitarianism" and how it relates to the utilitarian explanation of political obligation (text in Wolff, p. 50).

(Here I will disregard the fact that happiness is hardly quantifiable and will not question whether the pursuit of utility is moral)

If I understood correctly Wolff's text, according to "indirect utilitarianism", individuals must simply obey laws, because such a behaviour would bring happiness to everyone.

Very well. But then, in Wolff's words (p. 51), "it is not for the individual to consider the effect of following the law on the level of happiness within society". Whereas the laws should be obeyed (and passed) only if they are to increase "human happiness" (p.51).

I therefore do not understand: individuals must obey laws, because this brings happiness to society, but individuals do not have to obey laws if those laws do not bring happiness to society; however, individuals are not to consider, whether the fact that they obey laws is making the society happy or not, they should just obey. 🤔

Finally, who/what is it then, that decides whether a particular law would produce more happiness or not? Is this government? "The utilitarian political philosopher" (p.51)? Is s/he not an individual? And is government not a handful of individuals too? Why is their measurement/understanding of happiness more accurate than that of other individuals?

I would be grateful if you explained this to me or indicated where I made a mistake in trying to understand this theory.

Thank you.

[Show parent](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: ...and more...

by [Kevin Galalae](#) - Thursday, 14 May 2009, 08:30 AM

One can only consider Prof. Wolff's example "excellent" if one intends to discredit utilitarianism as a viable and sensible ideology. For the example to stick it would have to be accepted by an utilitarian authority as accurately reflecting the application of utilitarian principles and I think you would be hard pressed to find such a body.

Utilitarianists profess to support actions that bring maximum benefit to the greatest number of people, not actions that bring maximum misinformation to all; which is what Lord Denning's judgement brought. Any utilitarian body would predictably reject Prof. Wolff's example as being merely a case of bad judgement from a bad judge that ultimately amounted to an egregious miscarriage of justice and not a judicial and judicious application of utilitarian principles.

A utilitarian body could subject Prof. Wolff's example to the following test, a series of questions aimed at the populace that Lord Denning purported to defend. To prove the point, that hypothetical utilitarian body could ask each citizen the following questions:

1. Do you consider imprisoning innocent people right or wrong?
2. Do you want your officials to lie to you or tell you the truth?
3. Do you want to live with a false sense of security or in actual security?

Obviously, most if not all people would answer that they believe it wrong to imprison innocent people, that they want truth and not lies from their officials, and that they want to live in actual and not false security. Since all answers contradict the logic and morality of Lord Denning's decision, the utilitarians could claim that the judge's judgement runs counter to the people's values and expectations and would therefore have no positive impact on their lives. And if it has no positive impact, then the judge's decision could not possibly be an action sanctioned by utilitarians, or reflecting utilitarian ideology.

The judge was trying to protect the credibility of the police force and not the safety of the people. His action, therefore, can in no shape or form be considered a legitimate application of utilitarian principles.

A better example of utilitarian ideology in action would be the following:

1. The use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
2. The use of harsh interrogation techniques (a.k.a. torture) on terrorists.

In the first case, the American administration argued that by using the atomic bomb they brought about the end of the Second World War and in so doing saved the world millions of lost lives and untold misery. They also argued that by showing its willingness to use the bomb, America would have deterred others (i.e. the Soviet Union) from threatening the American people in the future. Keep in mind that I do not sanction these views, but I appreciate their logic as essentially utilitarian.

In the second case, the Bush administration argued that it prevented further attacks and therefore the use of harsh interrogations and torture have saved lives. They also made the case that by being tough on terrorists they will have discouraged others from attacking America.

Once again, let no one believe that I sanction these actions just because I mention them here as plausibly reflecting utilitarian principles, for nothing could be further from the truth. Nevertheless, both would stand scrutiny and would, I believe, be acceptable to that hypothetical utilitarian authority I have invoked.

As for the arguments you brought against utilitarianism and the contradictions you have identified, I find them illuminating and very perceptive. However, I don't believe you asked me to answer your question, but Giovanni, so I will cede to him since I am no authority on utilitarianism, even though I have been cornered by you, Emily and Ivor as a defender of utilitarianism.

As the examples above amply demonstrate (and many more can be brought to bear), I have again and again devastated the half-baked arguments of my fellow students with counter-arguments that made clear the errors in their thought. I did this as pleasantly as I could and well within the bounds of civilized discourse, but the effect was nonetheless frustration in the heart of these students and a dislike for me. For that I make no apologies since the pursuit of knowledge and truth must take precedence over anything else in an academic environment.

Had Dr. De Grandis been an impartial judge, he would have noticed this and he would have taken the students' chorus of complaint against me with a grain of salt. Unfortunately, Dr. De Grandis was motivated in his decision by his own biases. Equally, had my fellow students not been green with envy and blinded by their own resentment they would have realized that their motivation was to find release for their anger and not to act in the name of justice.

## **POINT 5**

(The decision to apply the most severe punishment is inconsistent with the department's common application of the rules and with the university's mission, values and objectives.)

Having taught at the university level, I am aware of the fact that conflict is resolved according to due process. A netiquette offense is usually answered with an official warning, a second offence is followed by a temporary suspension, and a third by eviction from the course. Due process seems to have been suspended in this case.

Evidence that due process was not followed is offered by the Departmental Regulations which explicitly state:

7. *The following procedure will be followed in relation to breaches of discipline:*

*a. An incident will be reported as soon as possible to the relevant Deputy Director, who will consider whether there is a case to be addressed. The Deputy Director will investigate by seeking information, as necessary, from the student and the tutor (or other member of the Department as relevant) together with any other witnesses or persons thought to have relevant information;*

Since the investigating authority has not solicited information from me before deciding to expel me from the course, article 7a of the departmental regulations was violated. This violation is doubly exposed by the discrepancies present in the official communication. While Dr. De Grandis has informed me that *“the Director of Public Programmes will assess the situation by reading through **all the course postings and the emails between**”* Dr. De Grandis and I this has not occurred.

**tutor.politicalphilo** ([tutor.politicalphilo@conted.ox.ac.uk](mailto:tutor.politicalphilo@conted.ox.ac.uk))

Mittwoch, 3. Juni 2009 15:47:55

[kevin.galalae@hotmail.com](mailto:kevin.galalae@hotmail.com))

Kevin,

the Director of Public Programmes will assess the situation by reading through all the course postings and the emails between you and I.

From now on, if you have any queries, please contact Claire Kelly:

[claire.kelly@conted.ox.ac.uk](mailto:claire.kelly@conted.ox.ac.uk)

Regards

Giovanni

Mr. Healy's letter indicates that he only looked at the postings from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June. This contradicts Dr. De Grandis' description and the narrow scope of Mr. Healy's investigation seems to represent a deviation from the university's stated policy on adjudication.

9 vi 2009

Dear Mr Galalae,

I have looked through the postings on the Political Philosophy online course forum for 1 – 3 June 2009.

It is clear to me that your posting on 1 June at 11.47 pm provoked a sharp response from Gloria Portella on 2 June at 01.45 am. This in turn gave rise to your own aggressive posting of 2 June at 03.03 am. A number of your fellow students took exception to that posting.

It is, regrettably, easy for online discussions to become aggressive, which is why we emphasise at the start of course the importance of all students adhering to the netiquette protocol.

In my judgement you overstepped the mark with your postings. The administrator was correct to remove your access to the forum. I am sorry that we have had to take this decision. It is, however, for the good of the class as a whole. I will ask the administrator to arrange for your fee to be refunded in full.

Yours sincerely,

Philip Healy

Director of Public Programmes

Either Dr. De Grandis gave me the wrong information or Mr. Healy did not give this case the attention he should have according to regulations. In a court of law this would be considered a technicality, but would nevertheless be sufficient for a decision in my favour.

The second point I wish to make is that an institution of higher learning is the proper environment for the exchange of ideas and reasoned debate and is entrusted with the responsibility to keep the channels of discourse open regardless of the views being offered and of the disagreements that ensue when opinions inevitably clash. I take the liberty of quoting article 9 of the university's expressed values:

***Academic freedom***

*9. The most fundamental value, underpinning all of our scholarly activity, is academic freedom, defined as the freedom to conduct research, teach, speak and publish, subject to the norms and standards of scholarly inquiry, without interference or penalty, wherever the search for truth and understanding may lead. (University of Oxford Strategic Plan 2008-9 to 2012-13, p. 4)*

I contend that this value has been disregarded in this case, as the decision to expel me from the course for spurious motives does a disservice and runs counter to the values and objections of higher education. As a result, the university's commitments to excellence and truth have also been compromised.

**POINT 6**

**(Dr. De Grandis' decision and Mrs. Portella's actions subvert my constitutional right to free speech and my academic right to expound ideas and ideals without fear of retribution.)**

The right to freedom of speech is fundamental in any democracy and denotes the freedom to speak freely without censorship or limitations as well as to seek, receive and impart information or ideas regardless of the medium used.



This right is upheld nationally by the United Kingdom's Human Rights Act and internationally as a basic human right under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is recognized in international human rights law in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The ICCPR recognizes the right to freedom of speech as "the right to hold opinions without interference".

It is my contention that by curtailing my freedom of expression on the pretext that I have caused verbal offense to a fellow student, my right to freedom of speech has been infringed upon and I will welcome the opportunity to prove this in a court of law.

The law is specific on the instances when freedom of speech can be curtailed; these being: statements that are uttered to provoke violence or incite illegal action, the utterance of words in face-to-face occasions that are likely to cause a breach of the peace, libel and slander, obscenity, defamation, incitement to racial hatred, incitement to religious hatred, and conflicts with national security in times of war. Clearly, none of the above applies to my predicament even in the mildest sense.

It is therefore fair to declare and rather easy to prove that I have been denied my constitutional right to free speech in a rather cavalier fashion by people with ulterior motives and in the context of self-defence to false accusations. It is even easier to show that the impartiality of others was allowed to dictate the form, length and content of my free speech in an environment entrusted to defend and nurture free speech as the most important tool in the pursuit of truth and understanding.

In allowing this to happen the university breaks its own rules. The *Disciplinary Regulations for Students* state:

*1. No student on the Department's courses shall intentionally or recklessly:*

*b. disrupt or attempt to disrupt the lawful exercise of freedom of speech by members, students, and employees of the University or by visiting speakers*

(Department for Continuing Education Regulations 1 of 2007, p.1)

In demanding that I be prohibited from posting, several students have undermined article 1b of the university's regulations. In removing me from the course on spurious grounds, the university has breached my right to free speech and is thus in clear violation of British and international law.

## POINT 7

(Appropriateness is a culturally and individually relative term and an online course which draws students from across the globe needs to be tolerant of the differences they bring to the table, giving participants the widest latitude to express themselves.)

Dr. De Grandis has deemed my language inappropriate. Leaving aside the context in which my allegedly inappropriate language caused offense, I would like to point out that different cultures and different individuals belonging to the same culture often have widely diverging views of what is or is not linguistically or behaviourably appropriate. To take as narrow a view of appropriateness as Dr. De Grandis did in judging me invites abuse and misuse and places language at the mercy of questionable motives.

Dr. De Grandis and Gloria Portella have apparently found my comments inappropriate on account of the rudeness they allegedly contain and in so doing have reserved the right to prohibit me from expressing my point of view. But if rudeness is sufficient reason to infringe the right to free speech, then so should other equally spurious motives. If I were to reciprocate in kind, then I would be fully within my right to deny Mrs. Portella the right to participate in the forums due to her inability to express herself coherently and without gross grammatical mistakes, which, I could argue, offends my linguistic sensibility and hinders my ability to understand her meaning thus forcing me to labour beyond the course requirements to understand her. I would also be justified in denying Mr. Ivor Middleton, a fellow student, his right to free speech on account of his “inappropriate” use of humour in situations and in relation to subjects that, I could contend, deserve the utmost solemnity. Equally, I could contend that Dr. De Grandis is unfit to teach because he is rather hot-headed, prone to accusing others of offenses he is also guilty of, and incapable of impartiality.

Yet despite accusations from several corners that I am intolerant of others’ views, an accusation I forcefully reject, I have never attempted to curtail anyone’s freedom of speech or freedom of thought, let alone condescend to demand that people are ejected from the course because their way of expression offends my sensibility. The evidence speaks to the contrary, for even though I am the one being victimized, it appears that I am the only one with the integrity to stand up in defence of freedom of speech, both implicitly (through the content of my postings) and explicitly, as the following email that I addressed to Dr. De Grandis will show:

**kevin galalae** ([kgalalae@hotmail.com](mailto:kgalalae@hotmail.com))

Mittwoch, 3. Juni 2009 14:41:23

Giovanni,

Thank you once again for being a man of your word.

I wish to make myself clear now of how I will proceed in the eventuality that the Director of Public

Programmes decides to make my removal from the course final. In my view, the offence for which I am being punished is to have posted political ideas that are controversial and dispute the status quo, as such my dismissal from the course is a curtailment of my freedom of speech and therefore a human rights violation. This will not sit well with Oxford University's reputation as an institution dedicated to knowledge and truth, especially since the University has a history of repression that it certainly does not want to repeat. I also wish to make you aware of the fact that I have fought such battles my entire life and that I come from a family that has fought such battles for at least three generations. I have 30 years of experience in this field and the dedication and character to pursue any challenge to my rights or indeed to anyone's rights. Furthermore, I have yet to lose a battle. Should Gloria have met with the same treatment by Oxford as I have, I will make her cause my cause as well and will fight with her side by side to ensure that justice prevails.

Having said this, I want to assure you that you continue to have my utmost respect and that my reaction to this issue is not an attack on you or your abilities as a teacher, which are excellent, but a matter of principle.

Last, I would like to know if I will have a chance to defend myself in front of the decision makers and if you will make them aware of all pertinent facts to ensure that they are basing their decision on complete information.

Thank you,  
Kevin Galalae

If Oxford University seeks to increase its revenue sources by reaching out to international students, then the university is obligated to take in consideration the wide divergence of what is considered acceptable debate and to give students of all backgrounds the ability to express ideas and to challenge others according to their own understanding of what is appropriate. Failing to do so, places students from behaviourally aggressive or linguistically liberal cultures at a great disadvantage and contradicts the university's claim to offer an equal playing field.

If the university and its faculty lack this cultural understanding then it should restrict itself to students from Great Britain alone.

## **POINT 8**

(The manner in which individuals debate differs as a result of cultural values and the individual's background and life experience.)

First, I would like to point out that the manner in which people debate differs widely from country to country. In South Korea, parliamentarians often extend their verbal arguments to fist fights yet no one dares to suggest that they be expelled from parliament. Where I come from, couching ideas in euphemisms and niceties, as is the custom in Great Britain and in many western European countries, would earn one the strongest opprobrium and accusations of dishonesty and hypocrisy. Where I come from, a debate is a battle of wits and those who faint at the naked sight of truth should not engage in it. Debating political philosophy is not for the

feble-minded or the faint-hearted, and the power of ideas should not be diluted for their sensibilities, for in so doing ideas and ideals are debased.

In matters political, impartiality is a fiction and the pretence of lack of bias is just that, pretence. Hiding one's true intentions and diluting one's thoughts for mass consumption is in my part of the world a much greater offense than strong language.

Just as there are cultural differences about the notion of debate, there are also differences between individuals; differences derived from dissimilar life experiences and varied socio-economic backgrounds. It is clear that Dr. De Grandis and several of my fellow students have a rather tame manner of debating, which is undoubtedly the result of their lives' particular backgrounds. I believe it is fair to say that those who have suffered as a result of political and ideological divides have earned the right to forcefully address notions they know to be dangerous from personal experience.

How many of my fellow students, for instance, know what it means to bleed in the trenches of political resistance? Do they know what it is like to have your father taken away from you at an age and then suffer the agony of knowing that the person you love most in this world is caged, starved and tortured by people who hold faulty political ideas? Do they know how it feels to start from zero and with no support system in a country that operates according to the dog-eat-dog principle of competition? Do they know the indignity of working for minimum wage and facing hunger and desperation? Do they know what it takes to go on hunger strike to be allowed to attend university? Do they know how it hurts when one's younger brother is left behind and years pass before the family is reunited? Do they know what it is like to be surrounded by hypocrisy in a society that sells itself as man's best hope? No, they don't. Therefore, people who do not know the consequences of embracing false ideologies, the damaging effect of questionable ethics, and the lack of integrity when faced with real life dilemmas should know better than to impose their empty niceties on those who do.

And because they do not know, they have no right to prescribe to people like me a detached tone and manner of expressing ideas that can potentially kill, starve, maim and imprison millions; a tone and a manner of thinking that shows neither passion nor compassion for the condition of countless human souls. If they reserve that right for themselves, then I and those like me, those who have suffered and continue to suffer the consequences of such intellectual and moral lassitude, have the right to demand that couch philosophers should not profess ideas and ideals without an appropriately passionate and compassionate tone. My life's predicament entitles me to the right of passion just as Dr. De Grandis' life predicament entitles him to the right of dispassion.

## THE INCIDENT

Now that we know what preceded the alleged breach of netiquette, let us look at the incident in question.

First we have Dr. De Grandis' question which leads people on and encourages them to point fingers.



Students where are you?

by [Giovanni De Grandis](#) - Monday, 1 June 2009, 03:55 PM

I have noticed that apart from a small group of students who contribute regularly to the forums, the majority is not participating or not doing so regularly. I would like to understand the reasons of this limited participation, but I need your help to do so. I would greatly appreciate any clue or explanation of the reasons that are holding back the students who are not regularly present on the forums. In particular, I would like to know whether there is any feature of the discussions that is disturbing you, or intimidating you or that is putting you off. If you would like the forums to be somehow different, this is the place to express your wishes, worries and complaints.  
Thank you in advance for your help 🙏

Mrs. Portella seizes the opportunity and responds as follows:



Re: Students where are you?

by [Gloria Portella](#) - Monday, 1 June 2009, 09:47 PM

I'm learning a lot from this course, especially through text and posts readings. I love to contribute to the forums, and I've been doing my best to do so. Specifically this last week, I've been limited by a strong sinus infection (15 days of antibiotics, starting three days ago) but one thing that seems to be hard for me to deal with is the lenght of the texts posted. We usully have a lot of pages to read and keeping up with the posts definitely has been something difficult for me. I wish the posts were shorter so that we could interact in a more constant basis and move forward with different points quickly, instead of going deeper. This is what I expected, considering this is an undergraduate course. However, this has been a great learning opportunity for me, I promise I'll put more effort in participating at the forums.

Feeling addressed by her complaint about the length of the posts I try to establish if indeed she means me so I post the following:


Re: Students where are you?

by [Kevin Galalae](#) - Monday, 1 June 2009, 11:47 PM

Guilty as charged, Gloria and Ivor. Guilty as charged. Unfortunately, philosophy does not lend itself well to headlines. Also, think of it this way, while it takes me an hour or more to complete a lengthy response, it only takes you 5 minutes to read.

(I kept this one short, didn't I?)

Gloria then confirms my suspicion with the following reply:



Re: Students where are you?

by [Gloria Portella](#) - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 12:28 AM

Kevin, philosophy does lend itself well to headlines. Actually, from my perspective, short sentences implies a great knowledge. No one is able to write a short sentence if he/she does not know really well the subject, that's why the great philosophers were able to make sense of themselves in just one sentence: they knew what they were talking about.


I have just finished a course in Theory of Knowlegde which is much more complicated than this one, for the concepts and wording, and no one was allowed to post more than two or three lines. It worked very well and we had wonderful discussions. So, by experience, I can assure you that shorter posts are wellcome in courses about philosophy. 😊

Just as an example on how small texts can be powerful:

"All of us who are concerned for peace and triumph of reason and justice must be keenly aware how small an influence reason and honest good will exert upon events in the political field."  
(**Albert Einstein**, 1954)

Had she only confirmed my suspicion and restrained from further attacks, I would have left it at that, but she proceeded to imply that my inability to express myself concisely shows lack of

knowledge and demonstrates that I don't know what I am talking about. I take issue with her attack on my intelligence and her attempt to scapegoat me for her inability to keep up with the course work by posting the following reply:



Re: Students where are you?

by [Kevin Galalae](#) - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 04:47 AM


Perhaps you ought to spread the blame a little bit, Gloria. In reading your explanation for your recent absence from the fora one would believe that I have singlehandedly prevented you from contributing. Wouldn't it have been closer to the truth if you had said that the reasons for your absence are several: a recent cold, two children and a husband to take care of, language barrier, professional duties, laziness perhaps, the need to sleep nine hours a night maybe, etc?

Further to that, my inability to express myself in headlines, as you would have it, is a reflection of my lack of knowledge. I apologise for not living up to your high standards, but we all have to make due with what little fate has endowed us with. I guess I don't know what I'm talking about. Be that as it may, I am eager to be illuminated by you, if you would rise to the challenge.

*"That's why the great philosophers were able to make sense of themselves in just one sentence", you say. Pray show one philosopher who has explained his/her Lebensanschauung in just one sentence and I will henceforth express myself in just one phrase every time I post. And that's a promise.*

The precedent you cite (i.e. your previous course) as an example to emulate for the brevity of its postings need not be our cast to follow. Every course and every class has a life of its own. But if you had ever taught you would know that.

The only thing that can be construed as an insult is my suggestion that laziness might have prevented her from keeping up with the work rather than my lengthy postings. All other factors are substantiated by her own posts on previous occasions. She then lets loose in a full out attack.



Re: Students where are you?

by [Gloria Portella](#) - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 06:45 AM

Kevin, to begin with, I defended my point of view, like you it or not, agree you with it or not. You're a bright man with a clear emotional problem: you simply

cannot control yourself. Living in community does require from everyone a minimum of education and respect to others, something you definitely do not care about. I agree 100% with Nicola. And using your terminology and direct approach, I do think that if you were less emotional and more balanced in your speech other students would feel more comfortable to join our forums. By the way, Giovanni, I'm sorry to post this words right now, but I'm not participating at a political philosophy course at Oxford for having my right to kindly express my points of view disrespected by someone who feels he is the center of the Universe. Unless you tell me I'm obliged to, I'll not participate in the forums anymore. And here, again, is my suggestion: ask everyone to keep the posts short, in the end, we are here to exchange ideas not to feel as we were obliged to discuss in the rithm Kevin wants to impose nor to discuss his nonsenses. Good Luck!

While I accused her only of laziness she accuses me of a series of shortcomings: (1) emotional problem, (2) lack of control, (3) lack of education, (3) lack of respect for others, (4) that I believe myself to be the center of the universe, (5) and that everything I say is nonsense.

Considering the number and the severity of Mrs. Portella's charges, my retaliation is rather controlled:



Re: Students where are you?

by [Kevin Galalae](#) - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 08:03 AM

Well, I guess the time has come to call a spade a spade. People like you Gloria have stopped posting because of one or all of the following reasons:

1. They find my superior intellect humbling.
2. They dislike my socio-political theories but have no moral or logical arguments to discount them.
3. The truths I painstakingly spell out force them to look deep inside their hearts and face their demons, be they deep-seated prejudices, class conceit, or false loyalties.

Is that concise enough for you?

By stating that I don't know what I am talking about and that all I say is nonsense, she is insinuating that I am a simpleton and that it takes her superior intellect to discern this. My retaliation gave her a taste of her own medicine, but is just that retaliation, retaliation to Mrs. Portella's direct attack on me, thus a defensive act.



It is interesting to note that Mrs. Portella's loss of control reveals the true motives of her dislike of me and the initial charge about the length of my postings is revealed to have been just a way of making her attack on me palatable to the university's netiquette rules.

Nevertheless, several students take the opportunity provided by Mrs. Portella and Dr. De Grandis to pile on me. That I have been singled out for opprobrium by several of my fellow students for allegedly breaching netiquette is a consequence of their accumulated frustration with my ability to put forth solid arguments in tough debates rather than their professed indignation with my rudeness.

By excoriating me, the four students who added their voices to Mrs. Portella's attack on me, are merely venting their own frustrations and are using this incident to do so. I answered their attacks as follows:



Re: Students where are you?

by Kevin Galalae - Tuesday, 2 June 2009, 04:24 PM

Dear all,

I find your sense of justice oddly uneven considering that it is Gloria who attempted to scapegoat me for her absence from the forums, and then, in finding herself challenged, resorted to irrational insults.

If anyone has a problem with the "length" of my postings or the "forcefulness" of my arguments, then you have all failed to win a fair dispute and ought to have the integrity to accept defeat and to acknowledge the true reasons of your voluntary withdrawals.

After all, I have not forced anyone to engage with me and I certainly did not put a gun to anyone's head to read my lengthy postings.

So if you don't like what I have to say, stop trying to silence me on trumped up charges. It is unbecoming of the philosopher's ethic and achieves nothing more than to stifle the real potential and true purpose of philosophy, which is "to make one's beliefs consistent in areas in which it's not clear what to believe"

(<http://thewebofbelief.blogspot.com/2006/06/purpose-of-philosophy.html> ).

Note also that in attempting to control the form and content of what I have to say you are committing a far greater offense than my alleged rudeness.

I tell you what. Since I am a firm believer in the value of direct democracy, I suggest that we put this issue to a vote. Should a majority of the total number of students find that I should stop posting then I will, should however a majority of students find that I should continue posting to the best of my abilities and without restrictions in length or form dictated by a dissatisfied minority then I will and you shall bite your tongues until the end of the course.

My only condition is that all students without exception should cast a vote. Should we fail to get everyone to vote, we should drop the issue or leave it in Giovanni's hands.
--

When one considers Dr. De Grandis compromised position and the students' impotent anger, the entire is thrown in a different light; a light that exonerates me and indicts them.


If Gloria and the party of the malcontent had indeed been right, and I was suppressing the debate, then the forums should have been abuzz with lively exchanges. Alas the reality does not confirm this, for the forums have fizzled out entirely. The course has in the meantime become a dialogue between Ivor Middleton and Gloria Portella, and even more recently a monologue by Ivor Middleton, and this despite several entreaties from Dr. De Grandis and Claire Kelly, the online course manager, to get students to post. The proof is in the pudding, as they say. The allegations that I stifled the debate, forced it my way, or set too hard a pace have all been proven to be unfounded.

What can we therefore conclude from this incident and how it was handled?

1. That I was always one step behind Mrs. Portella, she being the accuser and I defending myself against her implicit and explicit accusations and insults.
2. That Mrs. Portella is the one who breached netiquette by being the aggressor and by "flaming... flying off the handle and ranting", to quote the university's own document.
3. That the confrontation was initiated by Gloria's scapegoating statement and that the opportunity to launch public complaints was offered by Dr. De Grandis' questionable decision to seek public responses to a private matter which should have been handled discreetly and to do so in a manner that invited attacks.
4. Going back to the forums one can see that my theories are based on sound reasoning and sober analysis, which invalidates Mrs. Portella's accusation that I post nonsense, that I am emotionally unstable, and that I consider myself to be the centre of the universe.
5. That the party of the malcontent are merely trying to prevent free and fair intellectual competition by offsetting their inabilities to win debates in underhanded ways.
6. That justice cannot prevail unless those who are entrusted with authority exercise it despite public opinion and mob pressure, which goes to show that unless passion and compassion brace intellectual and moral principles they crumble under the crushing weight of real life experience.


As a last piece of evidence that Dr. De Grandis and Mrs. Portella have revolted against my socio-political ideas and not against my breach of netiquette, which was only a pretext to eliminate me from the course in legally acceptable way, I offer the following history of their comments in relation to me. It shows that their praises were replaced by silence and then criticism at the time of the democracy forum, when I was the only one to defend direct democracy.

Dr. De Grandis' praise:



Re: Political Philosophy and Political Science  
by [Giovanni De Grandis](#) - Wednesday, 22 April 2009, 08:50 PM

Thank you for breaking ice with such a clear and informed explanation, Kevin.



Re: Hobbes's anthropology  
by [Giovanni De Grandis](#) - Friday, 1 May 2009, 04:50 AM

In reading your very rich message I realized that my use of the word 'anthropology' may be slightly misleading and that a little clarification might be useful.

**tutor.politicalphilo** ([tutor.politicalphilo@conted.ox.ac.uk](mailto:tutor.politicalphilo@conted.ox.ac.uk))  
5. Mai 2009 19:43:18

Dear Kevin,

I am sorry for having given you such a negative feedback on your post on the Hobbes and Locke forum. I should have mentioned and stressed all the many valuable ideas and features in your message. I am sorry for not having done so.

I have posted my public apologies in the forum and I just wanted to add a couple of things that are perhaps more appropriate in an email.

The first is about how I have come to see you. **You have struck me as a very able, enthusiastic, brilliant,**

**generous and confident student.** Perhaps I have unconsciously made the mistake of assuming that you were so broad-shouldered that I could cut the niceties and praises and go straight to criticisms and challenges. That was obviously awkward.

The second thing is about me. I am not very generous in praising people. It is in part a feature of my character and in part the result of the way I have been educated: positive reinforcement, encouragement and praise were not the praxis in my university. We were happy when we managed to avoid harsh criticism. I certainly do not want to commend this method of teaching and I completely agree with you that pointing out the positive feature and strong points in students' work is important and a more effective teaching practice. I try to do so, but I still sometimes have my lapses and unwittingly re-enact (bad) examples. I am not offering this as an excuse, but as a useful piece of information about myself, as a clue to help to interpret my way of (mis-)communicating.

I really hope you will accept my apologies and that you will continue to be such a great presence in the class: **you are a driving force in the course.**

Best wishes

Giovanni

Re: Rousseau (and Aristotle)

by [Giovanni De Grandis](#) - Wednesday, 6 May 2009, 12:51 AM

Kevin, I think your comments on Hobbes and Locke are spot on and very perceptive.



Re: Rousseau (and Aristotle)

by [Giovanni De Grandis](#) - Friday, 8 May 2009, 10:32 PM

Very good analysis, Kevin: I think you have highlighted the key issue: civilization can both elevate and corrupt humankind.



Re: Rescuing Locke?

by [Giovanni De Grandis](#) - Monday, 11 May 2009, 07:52 PM

A lot of food for thought here, thank you Kevin.



Re: On Hume (1)

by [Giovanni De Grandis](#) - Tuesday, 12 May 2009, 11:41 PM

Yes Kevin, I think that Hume was not saying that consent is not a desirable and attractive criterion of legitimacy, but that it is too demanding and it would deny legitimacy to virtually every existing government (at least in his times, but perhaps even today). I love your phrase "a mind uncorrupted by the strictly disciplinary knowledge that has dominated Western thought for the last two hundred years and has turned us all into trained incapacities"! May write it down on my book of quotations? 😊

Re: Nozick's objection to the principle of fairness

by [Giovanni De Grandis](#) - Monday, 18 May 2009, 07:27 PM

Finally, Kevin in stressing the importance of applying the principle of fairness not only to citizens' behaviour, but also on the allocation of the benefits of social cooperation has made a point that has remarkable similarity to Rawls's view of social justice that we will explore later on. It will probably be useful to come back to Kevin's reasoning when we will tackle Rawls.

Re: Nozick's objection to the principle of fairness

by [Giovanni De Grandis](#) - Tuesday, 19 May 2009, 04:07 AM

Kevin, I find your analysis remarkably lucid and penetrating, thank you for sharing it with us.

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Re: Nozick's objection to the principle of fairness

by [Giovanni De Grandis](#) - Tuesday, 19 May 2009, 04:15 AM

Thank you for your very comprehensive and exhaustive list, Kevin. I think you have mapped all the important differences

([tutor.politicalphilo@conted.ox.ac.uk](mailto:tutor.politicalphilo@conted.ox.ac.uk))

Mittwoch, 20. Mai 2009 11:12:34

Hi Kevin,

I am very sorry to read about the circumstances that forced you to give up the summer course in Oxford. Unfortunately the application to market logic to education has some very awful drawbacks. Not only academics are caught in a dreadful rat race that brings out the worse of them, but too often students are seen as sheep to shear, and that is especially true of overseas students. (On the other hand one has to admit that academics left to their own devices are prone to inefficiency and sloth: there are some hilarious descriptions of the slothfulness of Oxford in Adam Smith!). It is really a pity that you are not coming in August. I hope we will have some other occasion to meet.

Thank you for taking so gracefully my advice (but I would not call you verbose for **you have a very good ratio of intellectual substance to words. You have plenty of ideas and you are intellectually very generous:** I do really appreciate that).

Best

Giovanni

**tutor.politicalphilo** ([tutor.politicalphilo@conted.ox.ac.uk](mailto:tutor.politicalphilo@conted.ox.ac.uk))

Donnerstag, 21. Mai 2009 11:42:16

It is good to feel useful every now again, and it is a pleasure to have you as a student Kevin.

Best

Giovanni



Re: Plato's argument

by [Giovanni De Grandis](#) - Thursday, 21 May 2009, 08:03 PM

Thank you Kevin, Max and Patrick for kicking the discussion off with such stimulating postings. I can see the potential for a very interesting discussion and would like

everybody to join in: let's keep the ball rolling! 🤖



Re: Plato's argument

by [Giovanni De Grandis](#) - Saturday, 23 May 2009, 08:06 PM

Kevin and Max have offered us a very thorough and stimulating exchange, that has so many interesting arguments and good points on each side, that it would be definitely too long to recall them here!

There is an issue in particular that I would like to highlight and about which I would like to have more discussion and possibly other voices joining the debate.

Kevin made a very good point in stressing that knowledge and expertise are not concentrated among few peoples but they are thoroughly dispersed (and this is even more true in contemporary societies and the internet is a good example). But Max is in my view equally right in pointing out that we do not have a safe method or procedure to extract or distill this knowledge and expertise. As Emily suggests, democracy sometimes produces decisions and leaderships that are far from representing the best beliefs and wisdom available.

How can democracy win the challenge of effectively channelling and collecting the best knowledge and expertise dispersed in society?

Will we end up with the seeming paradox that we need a particular type of experts to perform this task? May it be the case that in the 21st century we still need a ruling elite, but not in the form of Plato's *philosopher kings* but, say, in the form of collectors and selectors of dispersed knowledge (let's call them knowledge managers) 🤖?

**tutor.politicalphilo** ([tutor.politicalphilo@conted.ox.ac.uk](mailto:tutor.politicalphilo@conted.ox.ac.uk))

Montag, 25. Mai 2009 12:04:44

Hi Kevin,

I think that your explanation of why you believed that I was Max is a wonderful demonstration of how a very clever, plausible and convincing reasoning can sometimes lead to wrong conclusions! But I enjoyed it: I really think you have a philosophical mind Kevin and that you should pursue philosophical studies after this course.

I'd love to engage more extensively with your posts, but I cannot do it for a number of reasons. One is that this would run a serious risk of turning the course into a dialogue between you and I in front of a more or less inert audience (possibly one that would keep shrinking as a consequence) - a bit like in some Platonic dialogues, you know. Another reason is that I think that it would be of great use for the other student to engage with your postings, and they will do it even less, if they knew that I will do it too

extensively: that's why I try to do it a little, but not too much. An altogether different kind of reason is a question of time. This course represent more or less 10% of my weekly teaching time (I am not employed full time to work on it) and it would take me a not small amount of time to engage extensively with your reasonings. It would be exciting and challenging (and by no means easy, believe me!) but unfortunately I have responsibilities towards several other students.

But it is great that you have found Max: your exchanges -like your exchanges with Ivor- are really interesting and add a lot of depth to the course.

May I borrow some of your remarks about him, when I write his final assessment? :-)

I have already borrowed your idea of peasant mentality in discussing Berlusconi's success with some friends. It is curious because I have often had a similar thought about Italy in terms of feudal mentality (the need for having a powerful patron), but I think that your ideas is more general and useful.

Kevin, now that we have got to know each other a little more and we know that we are not ill-meaning people, let's be direct and straightforward without the need to apologize.

Have a good week

Giovanni

This is the last positive comment I received from Dr. De Grandis. From this point on, Dr. De Grandis fell silent and then launched a series of criticisms and insults at me in private emails.

### **Dr. De Grandis' criticism:**

**tutor.politicalphilo** (tutor.politicalphilo@conted.ox.ac.uk)

Dienstag, 2. Juni 2009 21:23:44

Kevin,

some of your messages in the common room have been completely uncalled for, ranting and offensive. I cannot but agree with the feelings expressed by other students and I am very surprised that you have written the things that you have written.

Your behaviour is plainly a violation of the rules of the course, and I will consult with the course manager about the appropriate disciplinary action.

I think that you should apologize to other students and refrain from making any further posting for the time being.

Regards

Giovanni

**tutor.politicalphilo** (tutor.politicalphilo@conted.ox.ac.uk)



Mittwoch, 3. Juni 2009 14:58:44

Kevin,

I will ignore what is in the P.S. and simply point out one thing to you. This whole issue is unpleasant enough for everybody. I am trying to learn a lesson from the mistakes that I have made. I think you should better drop the explanation that you have spoken some inconvenient truth, exposed people's hidden motives and demonstrated your intellectual superiority and that has generated mean feelings against you. I don't think this was the case. Two things have not been accepted. One is your habit of attacking some of the ideas that you oppose not on their own merit, but by suggesting that they spring from ignoble motives. (The implication of this attitude is that who disagrees is not simply wrong, but evil. I hope you see this is the attitude of all religious fanatics and political repressive regimes). When you do that to dead philosophers it is a lack of charity, but when you do that with your fellow students this becomes a personal attack from a stranger and how can you fail to see that nobody accepts to have one's own integrity questioned by a stranger? The second is that you have subtly tried to force other students to discuss and consider your ideas. I have been stupid in not realizing it earlier, but it became apparent in the direct democracy forum. You have tried to turn the course into a tribune to express your ideas. These problems could have been discussed and solved in the common room discussion, but things took another turn that made it impossible to fix the problems.

And this is my last comment on the whole issue.

Regards

Giovanni

### **Mrs. Portella's praise and criticism:**

Re: Political Philosophy and Political Science

by [Gloria Portella](#) - Thursday, 23 April 2009, 05:13 AM

Great explanation, Kevin. Thank you for bringing a lot of clarity to this issue.

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Re: My most wholehearted apologies

by [Gloria Portella](#) - Wednesday, 6 May 2009, 12:46 AM

Dear Kevin and Giovanni,

maybe I should stay quiet but wouldn't feel comfortable to do so. There's nothing more valuable for me than freedom of expression, thus my need to talk.

I want to tell you that I admire you both and that after this great discussion you gained a fan. What makes men defend their points of view but passion and idealism?

***"Clarity of mind means clarity of passion, too; this is why a great and clear mind loves ardently and sees distinctly what he loves." (Blaise Pascal)***

Please, don't refrain yourselves from saying what do you think, especially because, as I can see, you're simply great in expressing yourselves!

[Show parent](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Rescuing Locke?

by [Gloria Portella](#) - Sunday, 10 May 2009, 04:49 AM

*Addressing the question of whether we can imagine any institution or political arrangement that would be truer to Locke's initial assumption is relatively easy. The WTO, IMF, and the United Nations, and the legal statutes that underlie them, come to mind immediately as institutions that would fall under this category, since they came into existence through negotiation and compromise sealed by the consent of all its members.*

I completely agree with Kelvin.



Re: Rescuing Locke?

by [Gloria Portella](#) - Tuesday, 12 May 2009, 11:05 PM

Kevin, who am I to criticize such an interesting proposal? I must admit that I personally believe that right now we are going right to the opposite side: nationalism is getting stronger in Europe, for instance. But, at the same time, this is forcing people to reflect on what kind of people they are, their relations with other people, and nature, as well, and on what is their role in this planet. Thus, even if I do not see your words turning into reality at this moment, I am sure that somewhere in the future, they will be seen as had been extremely visionary. I am feeling proud for having the chance to chat with you. I have just one question: how do you see the words *diversity* and *citizenship* or, according

to your theory, how would you define them?
--

The way the incident was handled reveals a series of paradoxes and inconsistencies that scream to be addressed.

1. An institution that prides itself for pursuing excellence in education is in this case rewarding lassitude, mediocrity, and lack of character.
2. Oxford students who do the absolute minimum pass and those who do more than they are required fail.
3. The student who has initiated the conflict, Mrs. Portella, is allowed to stay in the course while I, who have merely defended myself, am thrown out.
4. While many parties have a share of the blame, including Dr. De Grandis, I am the only one taken to account.
5. While everyone professes to support freedom of speech, freedom of speech is the first victim, ironically, just when it becomes the subject of the course.
6. If I am indeed the one who suppressed the dialogue in the forums, why are the forums after my departure even poorer in contributions? And since this is the case, why am I still kept out of the course?
7. Our opinions have been solicited and therefore I have not forced them onto the course.
8. There was no indication as to the length or forcefulness of our arguments. And since length and forcefulness are relative terms and subject to personal interpretation latitude should be granted.

## CONCLUSION

I believe I have supplied sufficient evidence to throw into question the impartiality of Dr. De Grandis, the ability of my fellow students to act in an even-handed manner, and the correctness of the accusation that the length of my postings inhibited the debate. In addition to this, I have pointed out several inconsistencies in due process, the intemperance of the decision to throw me out of the course, and the paradoxes that this decision entails.

In writing this appeal, however, I do not want to give the impression that I am questioning Dr. De Grandis' abilities as a teacher or his personal integrity. In all respects Dr. De Grandis is an excellent man and I am proud to be (sorry, to have been) his student. I am merely attempting to get to the truth and to regain my right to free expression and to academic pursuit, which I have

been denied on spurious grounds. I believe the evidence I have offered is clear. I also believe that out of respect for my work and effort and since I have completed more than 60% of the work load I should be granted credit for the course.

Now that heads have cooled, we should put this incident aside, admit our errors, and concentrate our abilities and energy on learning and not on undermining each other.

I trust you have the wisdom and impartiality to make the right decision and that you will do so before the course is over.

Sincerely,

Kevin Galalae